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Unless the Lord build the house . . .

The Church and the New Pentecost

Ralph Martin

A Charismatic Renewal Book

Unless the Lord build the house...

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About This Book

In May, 1970, over 1600 people from all over the United States and Canada gathered in South Bend, Indiana, for the fourth Catholic Charismatic Renewal Convention. Ralph Martin, Notre Dame graduate, present coordinator of the Word of God community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, addressed the gathering on "The State of the Church Today." This book, an expansion of that talk, is published in response to the reception his message received there.

Ralph Martin began his Christian service work shortly after the end of the Second Vatican Council. Here he relates how, in his six years' experience in working and traveling across the land, he found something vital missing at the heart of the renewal in the Church. After probing the causes and effects of this inadequate renewal on the Christian life of the people and the institution, he proposes a startling remedy—the always radically new message of the gospel: the experience of a new Pentecost. He is the editor of a monthly magazine reporting on the worldwide charismatic renewal in the Church called *New Covenant,* P.O. Box 102, Main Street Station, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107.

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Church Renewal: On Sand or Rock?

Not very long after Vatican II had concluded and the first directions and results of renewal had begun to appear, there were already those who were wondering whether the thrust of renewal released by the Council was not somehow misdirected. There were those who wondered whether we were not getting wrapped up in things of secondary importance and missing, or purposely neglecting, what has to be at the heart of any truly significant renewal of the Church, namely, a renewal in the turning of our lives and hearts to God. One of them, Charles Davis, the English theologian, said some things at that time which are still worth pondering today, regardless of the approach he himself took to solving these problems:

> Much speaking in different places on themes of renewal has brought me into contact with many people seeking to revivify their faith. I have found a sense of emptiness, but together with it a deep yearning for God. There is an emptiness at the core of people's lives, an emptiness waiting to be filled. They are troubled about their faith; they find it slipping. I am not speaking of those who are worried about recent changes. These people are not. But they are looking for something more; they are looking for something to fill the void in their lives, and what they hear

does not do that. The more perceptive know they are looking for God. He seems to have withdrawn from the world and from them. They come to talks by speakers like myself. They hear about the new liturgy, about the new understanding of the layman's role, about collegiality, about the Church and the world, about a thousand and one new and exciting ideas. They are duly impressed. But who will speak to them quite simply of God as of a person he intimately knows, and make the reality and presence of God come alive for them once more?

Before such need, how superficial, pathetically superficial, is much of the busyness with renewal. We reformers know so much about religion and about the Church and about theology, but we stand empty-handed and uncomfortable when confronted with sheer hunger for God. Holiness is less easily acquired than fluency in contemporary thinking. But people who, after listening to our enthusiastic discourses, quietly ask us to lead them to God are, though they do not know it, demanding holiness in us. I fear they may find everything else but that. The harnessing of modern publicity and know-how to reforming zeal is a potent cause of deception. Saints were required in the past to renew the Church. We suppose we can get by as spiritual operators.

Zeal for renewal may be used as a way of escaping God. The busier we are about liturgical matters, the lay apostolate, ecumenism, the biblical revival, reform of Church structures and all the rest, the more incessant our activity in the cause of the aggiornamento, the less need there is to confront the reality of God in our own lives. A fear prevents us from admitting the emptiness we should find there. (*America,* January 29, 1966)

Now, six years after the close of the Council, we might do well to ask: are all our parish councils, associations, synods, workshops, conferences, due process systems, multimedia religious education programs, computerized and publicized diocesan finances, plainly dressed bishops, married deacons, inner-city priests and nuns . . . producing a modern *Church* (ecclesia — a people called out to be dedicated to God, in the world but not of it) or a poor imitation of the modern world?

Message Not Understood

The main thrust of renewal has proceeded on the basis of *presupposing* that the kerygma, the basic Christian message, had been effectively appropriated by the Christian

people. What was needed, it was thought, was a theological updating that would centrally include a drawing out of the implications of Christianity for social action in the modern world. Another central focus of the renewal has been to work at the democratization of church structures. This, I believe, has had tragic results.

The saving message, the kerygma, has not been effectively understood or appropriated by the Church as a whole. Countless millions of baptized Catholics in this country and others, have not personally committed their lives to Jesus, accepting him as their Savior and Lord. Nor do they, despite the sacrament of confirmation, experience the effective power and working of the Holy Spirit in their lives. To sacramentalize or catechize in a situation like this can only produce a misshapen Christianity.

Personal misfortunes are certain to follow in the lives of those who attempt to live the Law without a continuing personal experience of grace, the implications without the foundational reality. To undertake reflection or action on the Christian mission, for example, without effectively experiencing the salvation and power given in Jesus Christ, is to be sure to distort that very mission. Examples of this abound in the Church today.

Christians concerned about renewal are beginning to recognize this as the situation, and here and there voices are beginning to be raised drawing our attention to it.

Evangelization Needed

Bishop Flores of San Antonio recently stated that many of the Church's problems will not be solved by getting people to the sacraments but by a fundamental evangelization. He pointed out that many Catholics have never been effectively evangelized (brought to an effective personal faith and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord) but rather have been sacramentalized. (Speech reported in *The Texas Catholic,* November, 1970)

In January, 1970, *America* magazine ran a special issue on the Church in Latin America, in which certain bishops

were reported as saying that the fundamental strategy of the Church in Latin America, which is based on putting large amounts of money and manpower in the work of reeducation or catechesis, presupposed an evangelization which has never effectively taken place. This is also the strategy which is being used in large parts of the renewal in this country and many others as well.

To teach Christian social principles or morality to those who are not experiencing that grace-filled fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, no matter how many "new liturgies" they go to (by and large most liturgies celebrated today are not effectively evangelistic) is to put people in the position that the Jews were in under the Law — the position of having an ideal of living which could not be achieved under the ordinary resources of their own selves. This situation produces in those who take the Law seriously (then or now) frustrations and distortions of authentic religious life and personality.

In the year that saw the Council conclude, 1965, I began full-time Christian work. In the last six years I have traveled extensively across the United States and Canada, and have encountered almost every kind of situation that exists in the Church today. I've visited many seminaries, motherhouses, provincialates, Catholic universities, theology faculties, inner-city work, religious education work (both in Catholic schools and CCD programs), national lay organizations, campus ministry situations, and a variety of ordinary parish, convent, rectory situations.

When I first started traveling, I noticed that the strategy in renewal that was most commonly adhered to wrongly presupposed that the basic Christian foundation was in good shape, that the fundamental understanding of and commitment to the person of Christ was clear and strong. It concentrated then on implications of the basic Christian commitment, particularly in the social dimension, as well as on liturgical and structural changes. The liturgical changes were almost invariably superficial. *I believe that this widely accepted approach to renewal is not only fundamentally wrong in its basic presupposition, but because it has been so exten-*

sively accepted and acted upon throughout the Church, indeed being the overwhelmingly dominant response to the call for renewal crystalized by Vatican II, it has produced a seriously distorted Christianity throughout the Church.

Secular With Christian Trappings

Six years now of a renewal effort that has presupposed the basic foundation and has concentrated on what are in many cases very important, but in the final analysis, secondary concerns, has produced many areas of seriously deficient Christianity. There are many in positions of leadership in the Church today who perhaps still use the language of Christianity, or more commonly, theological jargon, but effectively deny its traditional meaning and power. They live what is basically a variety of secular humanism with what on close inspection are simply Christian trappings. Years of concentration on the important but secondary areas of the social implications of Christianity and structural reform, coupled with the almost total ignoring of what is truly fundamental to the Christian life, has produced in the lives of many a distorted vision and practice of Christianity which on many points are explicitly hostile to the foundation of the Christian life.

If six years ago the basic foundation was weak, today it is not uncommon to find a "theology" and system of values that is quite solid, but which also happens to function as a counter-foundation not only significantly different from authentic Christianity, but outrightly hostile to it even though it continues to use Christian language and forms. It is not uncommon for those who are involved in this counter-foundation to exhibit a number of the characteristics described by Paul to Timothy in his second letter. In fact, a good way of summing up what's going on is that people are holding to the form of Christianity but denying its power.

> But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive . . . holding the form of religion but denying the power of it . . . the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accu-

> mulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths. As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tm 3:1-5; 4:1-5)

There is not only the need today to undertake a fundamental evangelization recognizing the secondariness of so much of the renewal so far, but also a need to come to grips with the counter-gospel attitudes that the very incompleteness of the renewal has produced. I believe that this can best be communicated by sharing in some detail a number of the actual situations I've been involved in over the past six years.

High School Retreat

Shortly after another young man and I began to work together we had the opportunity to stay overnight at a monastery retreat house on our way to another destination. A retreat happened to be in progress and the retreat master asked us to briefly "share" with the girls from our own Christian experience. It was a retreat for about 100 high school seniors from a group of Catholic academies on the East Coast. We briefly shared our own "testimony" of how we had come to a fuller commitment to and relationship with Jesus Christ, and experienced God's love, detailing some of the changes in our lives. The results were surprising. The whole retreat became extremely attentive, a number of girls began to cry, and when the retreat master saw what was happening he asked us to stay and help give the retreat with him. In the course of the retreat a number of girls both privately and publicly stated that this was the first time in their lives that they had come to know God as a person with whom they could have a relationship, and the first time that they had committed themselves to the person of Jesus.

Until we arrived the retreat had been planned as a "theologically updated, socially aware" retreat on which the girls would take bus tours through inner-city poverty areas, and build community through what at that time were liturgical novelties, like the kiss of peace. The retreat, as planned, presupposed that after 12 years of Catholic education for

most of the girls the foundation of their Christian lives was solid, and so it was to focus on the implications of that foundation in the social order. What became apparent was that many of the girls had not seriously committed themselves to Christ, and that the presupposed foundation did not effectively and vitally exist.

Campus Ministry

A year and a half ago I began to have some particularly clear encounters with some of the "bad fruit" that the predominant renewal strategy had produced. I was asked to address a regional meeting of campus ministry (Newman) chaplains and student leaders on a topic of my choosing. After praying, I felt that I was supposed to speak about the parable of the rich young man. I did so, briefly speaking about what the parable added to our understanding of living the Christian life beyond being simply good and loving our neighbor, and what was involved in a relationship of discipleship to Jesus. Following Jesus in his relationship to his Father, of perfect obedience, spending nights in prayer; following Jesus in the utter orientation of our lives toward serving him and his kingdom, opening up to him all our resources of intellect, will, and material resources, time; submitting to him our thoughts and plans concerning career and marriage; following Jesus in calling men to repentance, to return to God. The response again was surprising, but in a different way.

After the talk one girl got up, crying, and managed to speak out with some bitterness, that the Jesus I had talked about was not her Jesus, that the Jesus she knew just said things about love, and that she hated the Jesus and gospel I spoke about. A young man then got up and told the girl to calm down and not get excited about differences in language, and assured her that she and I were in fundamental agreement and were just using different language, for after all, "Christianity and humanism are the same thing." Another man got up and expressed dissatisfaction with this easy solution to the difficulty, and suggested that there were sig-

nificant differences, beyond simply different languages, between Christianity and what secular humanists would understand and do with their lives. Another student got up and gave a brief discourse on how good it was to love people and how it did not matter what you believed. At this, one of the chaplains expressed amazement at the state of disarray their student leaders' fundamental Christian beliefs were in.

Afterward, at a private meeting with the chaplains, some of them admitted that their fundamental, unanalyzed strategy, picked up from the "Church environment," was to presuppose the foundation and work at getting social awareness, community feeling in liturgies, and consciousness of present relationships. They admitted also that the earlier session was an eye-opener as they saw what the situation actually was as regards the Christian foundations of their student leaders' lives, and what attitudes had been picked up from simply concentrating on a selected few of the popular renewal themes. A significant change in the direction of several of these campus ministries has resulted from this and similar encounters, and a number of promising, balanced ministries, which do not overlook the foundation, are emerging.

Shortly after this my wife, Anne, and I were asked to speak with a group of high school students from both Catholic high schools and a diocesan CCD program that is nationally known for being a leader in innovative religious education. We were asked to talk on prayer. Drawing from scripture, we spoke very simply about the personal relationship that is presupposed in Christian prayer, with our Father, with Jesus our Savior, Lord and brother, and with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus. In the question period afterward a number of interesting things were brought up. One student suggested that what we had said was all well and good if you accepted the Judeo-Christian tradition, but as anyone knew there were other traditions you could choose from, and he himself preferred to be a Buddhist, because he found their sexual morality more acceptable. As a matter of fact, this student was not well acquainted with Buddhism, for its sexual morality is very similar to the Christian code, but it revealed the way a powerful religious indifferentism

and ignorance have penetrated even the rather young—as it turned out, not in spite of, but because of the religious education he had been exposed to.

Another student questioned the usefulness of using the scriptures as a guide to truth, for, as anyone knew, they were an invention, centuries afterward, of the early Church. He further pointed out that John's gospel was obviously strongly colored by Greek philosophy, and we could not rely on the picture of Jesus it presented. His dates were a little off, and his biblical scholarship on John's gospel a bit out of date, (my wife happened to be taking a course on this gospel and was able to share some of the recent archaeological confirmations of the eyewitness character of important parts of the gospel) but his rejection of scripture, on the basis of an immature and pastorally insensitive presentation in his religion class, was quite clear. Another student made direct reference to the differences between what we had shared and what was being said in religion class, namely, that we seemed to be presenting definite answers as regards knowing and following Christ, and in class Christianity was presented as a never-ending search for answers, and that somehow everyone's opinion was "right for him." The notion of an objective truth, valid for all men, capable of being perceived and grasped in the person of Christ, had been completely destroyed.

Religious Education

A few months ago I was asked by the full-time religious educators responsible for the religious education of all Catholic students in the see city of a particular diocese, to give them a series of three weekly seminars on the Holy Spirit and prayer. Through this experience I understood more clearly why the students we had visited with a year before were in the condition they were. This diocese is nationally famous for many of its religious education "advances" and a number of its programs have been adopted in other dioceses throughout the United States. In the very first session it became clear that these religious educators had scarcely ever as a group

talked about what was fundamental to the Christian message, or, indeed, what it really was. Most of their conversations before had been dealing with questions of method and materials, working out their own interpersonal relationships, talking about how to relate to the students, complaining about the lack of funds, etc. When I gave a noncontroversial exegesis of the early apostolic preaching found in Acts, as it presents the basic way of salvation through Jesus of Nazareth, and presented it as the basis of all else, I was surprised to find that about half of the educators were opposed to the very notion that there was something fundamental and objective at the heart of Christianity. Several insisted that we had no way of telling what, if anything, was basic to Christianity, but that we were all simply on a quest for truth and that's what Christianity is all about.

This is probably one of the most widespread distortions of Christianity common today. It completely ignores the fact that what Christianity fundamentally is is an answer to the condition of man, an answer that rips through all of man's answers. One of the main leaders of the program, in a complete misunderstanding of the Council's notion of the "pilgrim people," insisted that Christians have no answers, but all they can do is join in the search that all men are on, and empathize with people's problems. The notion that the Church has been entrusted with a definite message, that there is a definite way to salvation revealed in Jesus of Nazareth, in fact, almost every one of the basic Christian truths, is either questioned or denied, sometimes with a vengeance, by the majority of this group of educators.

In the course of the three weeks, a few admitted the awkwardness of their being religious educators with nothing to teach, and one seriously expressed the possibility that he did not belong as a teacher of Christianity unless he believed in and knew its basic message. Several admitted that what they were doing wasn't religious education at all, but something called "pre-evangelization," and one expressed the fear that they could never do anything but pre-evangelism, for they had no good news to tell. One privately expressed grave doubts about the effects that their approach of presenting

Christianity, without personal commitment and submission to the person of Christ, was having in the hearts of the students. He noticed a hostility, even hatred, of certain basic gospel characteristics as humility and obedience.

Typical Around the Country

These are not isolated incidents of scattered situations that I'm picking out, but situations that are typical of many Church situations around the country. I could continue for quite a while with stories of seminaries where it is acceptable to mention anything except commitment to the person of Jesus, of religious orders that look to sensitivity training to solve all their problems when most of their members have stopped praying and are confused in their relationship to Christ, of theologians at Catholic universities who believe that Christianity can be adequately rephrased in the language of ecology and environmental concern without any reference to the person of Christ. In many of these situations confusion in faith has been followed, as it almost inevitably will be, by moral and psychological confusion and sickness. In short, I am aware of innumerable situations in which ignorance concerning the condition of the Christian foundation, and even of its nature, coupled with a preoccupation with certain popular renewal causes, has produced a seriously sick, distorted Christianity, still using the language and rituals of Christianity, but in many cases being in actual fact an agnosticism or secular humanism.

This sickness or distortion affects every aspect of Christian truth and life. I'd like to pick out three major areas of distortion that if we understood correctly would put us in the position to understand the whole situation. To effectively work in the situation as it exists today it is not enough to know and to be committed to the laying of the Christian foundation, the preaching and teaching of the kerygma. In order to effectively communicate, we have to relate what we're saying to the ways in which the language we have to use has been damaged in its communicating power and accuracy because the distortions that exist today often use the

same language but mean quite different things by it. I would like to direct our attention to widespread problems that affect the core meaning of the language we use when we talk about Christ, about Christian community and about Christian mission.

Christ

Perhaps the key to the whole counter-foundation of secular humanism cloaked in Christian language and rites lies in an understanding of Jesus Christ as Savior or, rather, in the lack of understanding or ignorance of the saving, redemptive work of Christ. It is quite common to hear Christ talked about as some kind of model—the man for others, the revolutionary, a great moral teacher, the teacher of love — but considerably less common to hear about his past, present and future action as Savior. Jesus as model is one thing, Jesus as the one who by his life, death and resurrection crushes the power of Satan, takes away our sins, restores us to union with God and with one another, and baptizes us in his Spirit so that we will be able to live and experience life as children of God is quite another. It is quite common in religious education, for example, to use selected passages from scripture, along with modern movies, records, figures from the news media, to try to communicate certain values, and hopefully a system of values, to students, but without referring to the need to appropriate the saving work of Christ, repent of our sin and receive his Spirit, in order to be able to do so. Basically, this is an attempt to promote parts of Christianity (the value system part although sometimes the values are not even Christian values) without Christ as the savior and baptizer in the Spirit who can make it all possible.

Unfortunately some of the most important values of

Christianity can be understood adequately only in explicit relationship to the fundamental saving work of Christ. It is hard for men to see such values as obedience, humility, contrition, repentance as even being important except as they are confronted with the condition they are in, brought face to face with Jesus and their need for salvation. To try to communicate what is called the Christian value system (although in practice critical values are often left out) without reference to the person of Christ, the need we have for repentance, forgiveness, receiving his Spirit and being part of his Body, is to take an unsound course. When we do, we run the considerable risk of effectively communicating some Christian values, generosity, for example, or concern for others (although the actual effectiveness of even this is questionable) but also in communicating values which are directly opposed to an acceptance of the whole Christian framework. For example, to work at communicating the value of openness or honesty out of context of the whole Christian fabric can also result in communicating the attitude of arrogance or callousness.

Even when certain values have been successfully communicated, say friendship, or openness to various opinions, it is often done in such a way as to erect further barriers to effective and total conversion to the person and service of Jesus. Pride, false self-sufficiency, selfishness, focus on self-fulfillment have also been communicated, and they strengthen the deepest resistance we have to surrender to the gospel message.

But more fundamentally, the disorder in our hearts was never meant to be adequately overcome only by a teaching of values, but rather by a forgiving of sin and a baptizing in the Holy Spirit and a life in Christian community. Communicating values or the Christian morality without also communicating the Christian power, the help that enables the morality to be lived, is simply to invite people to a life of frustration which can only result in personal guilt and despair or the outright rejection of the workability of the Christian way of life. The Law could not be lived under a man's own strength; it served only to reveal the need for the mercy of

God, for a savior, for the gift of the Holy Spirit that can make the Law something written on our hearts, something that we want to do, something that becomes, as we live in the Spirit, natural to us.

I recently talked with the director of a large retreat house on the East Coast who shared with me how for the last three years their retreats had consisted in "beating people over the head with" the need to act like Christians and love the large black population of the city, with virtually no results but a growing hostility and frustration. He went on to say that the retreat workers had begun to realize that they were asking people to act like Christians who had not yet become Christians in the full sense of the word. Many of those coming to the retreats had not fully committed their lives to the person of Christ, or experienced the power of his Spirit working in their lives, or had the support and contact with other Christians as Christians, all of which he felt to be the indispensable foundation for an authentic living of the Christian morality in all its dimensions, personal and social. They have begun to revise their retreats in this direction, recognizing that the foundation must be laid before the building can be erected. Christianity is not only an ideal, but contact with a personal power, the Holy Spirit, that enables us to live the ideal.

At the root of much of this confusion is an uncritical acceptance of that "worldly wisdom" and "philosophy" that Paul warned could completely obscure the actual truth and plan of God. It is only as we become aware of the sometimes radical discontinuity between the "wisdom" of the world and the wisdom of God that we can begin to understand the basic Christian message concerning the way to salvation and the person of Jesus.

God himself through his prophets and apostles warns us time and time again of the folly of supposing that our human wisdom and plans (what we think is valuable, is a good idea, is a reasonable way of doing things, etc.) are continuous with his wisdom and plans.

> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
> nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.

As high as the heavens are above the earth,
so high are my ways above your ways
and my thoughts above your thoughts. (Is 55:8-9)

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wordy "wisdom," however, lest the cross of Christ be rendered void of its meaning!

The message of the cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin, but to us who are experiencing salvation it is the power of God. Scripture says, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and thwart the cleverness of the clever."

Where is the wise man to be found? Where the scribe? Where is the master of worldly argument? Has not God turned the wisdom of this world into folly? Since in God's wisdom the world did not come to know him through "wisdom," it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the preaching of the gospel. Yes, Jews demand "signs" and Greeks look for "wisdom," but we preach Christ crucified — a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles; but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men.

Brothers, you are among those called. Consider your situation. Not many of you are wise, as men account wisdom; not many are influential; and surely not many are wellborn. God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's lowborn and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something; so that mankind can do no boasting before God. God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus. He has made him our wisdom and also our justice, our sanctification, and our redemption. This is just as you find it written, "Let him who would boast, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:17-31)

As for myself, brothers, when I came to you I did not come proclaiming God's testimony with any particular eloquence or "wisdom." No, I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. When I came among you it was in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation. My message and my preaching had none of the persuasive force of "wise" argumentation, but the convincing power of the Spirit. As a consequence, your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

> There is, to be sure, a certain wisdom which we express among the spiritually mature. It is not a wisdom of this age, however, nor of the rulers of this age, who are men headed for destruction. No, what we utter is God's wisdom: a mysterious, a hidden wisdom. God planned it before all ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age knew the mystery; if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. Of this wisdom it is written: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him."
>
> Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit. The Spirit scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God. (1 Cor 2:1-10)

Many of us are not able to hear the Word of God in all its starkness, in all its power, in all its apparent folly, until we seriously consider the hard thing God is saying concerning the world's ways and his ways.

We must recognize the existence and pervasiveness of what the scripture talks about as human or worldly wisdom, and to what extent, we, the Church, are permeated by it. There is a whole world view, system of values, order of priorities, guidelines for worthwhile action, patterns of speech and manners, that exist, for example, in university-educated America. It is not of one piece, of course; there are tensions, lefts, rights and centers, past and future developments, fierce debates about particular matters or whole directions, but it is something that can be pointed to as, by and large, "of the world." It simply hasn't been developed with a diligent seeking of God's Word, even if parts of this world view still bear Christian trappings and landmarks. At the moment I would suggest that the true Church has been greatly influenced by this world view, particularly that coming from university environments, so much so that in many facets of its life and work it is more impelled by worldly wisdom than the wisdom of God which, as scripture reminds us, is often radically discontinuous with human wisdom.

Even though there is a considerable spectrum from left to right in this predominant "worldly wisdom" it is possible to pick out an indefinite number of instances of the level of

thinking by which it is characterized. The kinds of ways in which this "worldly wisdom" offers a diagnosis of man's condition and proposes solutions can be typified by something like the following:

The root problems of the human race are ignorance, disease, greed, poor government, ill distribution of the world's wealth and resources, the breakdown of the family structure, mental illness, war, hostility between nations, lack of psychic integration in most people, etc. The solutions would be: a revolution, a rightist coup, more money for medical technology, better education for everyone, more psychologists and psychiatrists, a world government, agricultural technology, sex research, ocean research, a new system of courtship and marriage, a preemptive nuclear attack on China, unilateral disarmament, etc.

The Word of God is shocking as it speaks to us, if we dare hear, of the problems and solutions to the condition of mankind. First of all, it clearly regards all the problems that might commonly be listed as merely manifestations of a root disorder, symptoms, if you will, of an underlying disease. It further regards the commonly proposed solutions, as possibly meritorious actions at times, but all as simply dealing with the symptoms, the equivalent of treating cancer with aspirins. The Word it speaks to us about our condition is rebellion, independence, sin. The Word that God speaks to us is that the root cause of all our problems is our independence from him, our conscious or subconscious rebellion and hostility to him — that this is what is our fundamental and original sickness — sin. To let this Word sink in, to believe the Word of God about our condition, would change our lives. The point is that we can't even know ourselves, and what's wrong with us, by human wisdom; it's something that we can't trust our cloudy minds and senses for, something that we can know clearly only if God tells us. He does if we are ready to hear.

"Wisdom" that remains simply on the political, economic, educational, medical, scientific, psychological plane ends up missing the most important point, that the source of man's

problems is spiritual at its core and can't be dealt with except in a spiritual way; and not simply a spiritual way of man's devising, but *The Way* of God's choosing. In other words, if we solve India's food problem without dealing with the root sin problem, she will most likely become arrogant enough and rich enough to build nuclear weapons and get even with China or Pakistan. If we solve one manifestation of the root problem, it will pop out someplace else. And no matter what we do, we all die, we are all subject to corruption. Death has the last word and mocks all our efforts. The Word that God speaks to us about the solution is one of complete healing, complete restoration, personal and social, even the end of death, through the sacrifice of his son Jesus for us.

"Yes, God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him may not die
but may have eternal life.
God did not send the Son into the world
to condemn the world,
but that the world might be saved through him.
Whoever believes in him avoids condemnation,
but whoever does not believe is already condemned
for not believing in the name of God's only Son.
The judgment of condemnation is this:
the light came into the world,
but men loved darkness rather than light
because their deeds were wicked.
Everyone who practices evil
hates the light,
he does not come near it
for fear his deeds will be exposed.
But he who acts in truth
comes into the light,
to make clear
that the deeds are done in God." (Jn 3:16-21)

In the beginning was the Word;
the Word was in God's presence,
and the Word was God.
He was present to God in the beginning.
Through him all things came into being,
and apart from him nothing came to be.
Whatever came to be in him, found life,

life for the light of men.
The light shines on in darkness
a darkness that did not overcome it.

There was a man named John sent by God, who came as a witness to testify to the light, so that through him all men might believe but only to testify to the light, for he himself was not the light. The real light which gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world,
and through him the world was made,
yet the world did not know who he was.
To his own he came,
yet his own did not accept him.
Any who did accept him
he empowered to become children of God.

These are they who believe in his name — who were begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man's willing it, but by God. (Jn 1:1-13)

God's Word makes all the difference in what we understand, in what we do with our lives. We can't understand Christianity with popular wisdom — whether it be from famous theologians or Father So-and-So, or our local lay director of religious education. We must still our hearts and know that he is God and hear the starkness of his Word to man. If we don't hear and understand God's Word to us about our enslavement to sin, our subjection to the master of this world system, about the futility of thinking we can become free by our own efforts — even our maximum efforts of human will, intelligence, technology, religion—we can't begin to understand Jesus. He will simply remain for us a great, enigmatic figure or model, and the whole plan of God's salvation, of forgiveness of sin and baptism in the Spirit for those who repent and believe in the Lord, will remain veiled. Ignorance of God's Word to us about our problem (sin) and its solution (Jesus) can cause us to direct our lives in efforts which simply have no bearing on the real battle which is being waged on behalf of men, which is spiritual at its heart, and can be successfully participated in only with spiritual understanding and weapons. Ignorant of God's Word, our lives become then,

at one and the same time, trivial and tragic.

Obviously, confusion or blindness here at the very heart of Christianity, about the core-saving proclamation of the atoning death of Jesus and subsequent gift of the Spirit for the salvation of men, will have consequences throughout the whole Christian framework, affecting virtually every element. In the rest of this book I will explore further how distortions here affect our basic relationship with Christ, and then go on to some effects in the areas of Christian community and Christian mission.

"Christ in Others"

It's very common today for people to speak about seeing Christ in other people, or meeting Christ in other people. In fact, it's not uncommon for people to say that that's the only way they relate to him, as they don't find private prayer meaningful anymore, and don't find it relevant to speak to him or listen to him apart from conversations with other people. After a time in the history of the Church when the dangers of personal friendship were spoken of more frequently than the advantages, it is not unusual that the focus on personal relationships now would be for a time so strong. Unfortunately, for many people, particularly clergy and religious, discovering meaningful personal relationships has meant an increasing loss of contact with the historically unique individual, Jesus, risen from the dead and present now, as well as sitting at the right hand of the Father, the same Jesus who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and usher in the fullness of the kingdom. For many, the cult of interpersonal relationships has assumed the proportions of what can only be called idolatry.

As with most distortions, this one is based on a truth. Developed out of context, however, and in isolation from other important truths, it has become monstrous. There is a confusion here concerning the modalities of God's presence in the world. In some way, the scriptures and our experience tell us, the whole of the created universe reveals something of God to us; God is in his handiwork. In addition, he has

created the human race in his own image, and however distorted and shattered the image, it is true to say that each human being somehow can reveal something of God. And in some way, too, the light of Christ shines on each man coming into the world. He has also, however, made an extraordinary promise to those who are willing to become his disciples. He has promised to dwell within them in a special way, and in some real way identify himself with those who are abiding in a close union with him, so much so, *that for his disciples,* those who hear them hear him, those who give them a glass of water give a glass of water to him, those who feed and clothe them, feed and clothe him.*

Popularly these promises and passages that speak of Christ's identification with his disciples have been used in application of our encounters with all men. This is a serious confusion which mistakenly applies the promises connected with one modality of Christ's presence in the world (one of the most privileged and intense and intimately bound up with his continuing work) that of his presence in his disciples, to his presence in all men. Erasing the important distinction in scripture between those who are disciples and all men has serious implications; it completely clouds the whole point of Christ's coming, the change that can take place in a person's life as he turns to Christ and becomes a disciple.

The truth here, as with all the basic Christian truths, is not simply a matter of correct conceptual thinking, but it has tremendous implications for life, for what we experience or fail to experience. Orthodoxy is not simply a matter of keeping clear on certain things because it is traditional or old, but because it's true, and because the truth makes a huge difference for life. The concern for orthodoxy today as in other days, is a concern for truth, which in turn is a concern that men might find true freedom and have life and have it in abundance. God has provided a way to true peace, life, joy and love both in the present life and the life to come; if that

*For an interpretation of the meaning of these passages, very different from the ordinary one, see "An Apostle of Christ: Paul's Criterion," Joseph A. Grassi, M.M., *Bible Today,* April 1966, p. 1578ff.

way is obscured by saying that all men are brothers of Christ already, are disciples already, which is an outright lie, fewer will then know that there is a true life into which they can enter. The promises that Christ makes to and about his disciples don't become true for all men by sleight of conceptual hand, but by repentance, faith, baptism, the gift of the Spirit and Christian community. Facing up to the fact that the promises here are about helping Christ's disciples and not all men is an important step.

The exaggerated and oftentimes incorrect use of the judgment scene in Matthew 25, coupled with the subsequent disregard of other judgment scenes or any attempt to present a balanced picture of the modalities of God's presence in the world, has gone far in destroying the soundness of many Christians' lives. If people are now more sensitive about the poor, they are often foolishly derisive of private prayer, and woefully unaware of the adolescent eroticism of much of their "interpersonal encounters" with "Christ." With the most elementary spiritual discernment lacking, knowing or caring whether what we're encountering in a particular person is the potential Hitler in them, the possessive erotic strain in our nature, or indeed the pure and holy love and wisdom that come from life in Christ, becomes impossible. A good deal of "seeing Christ in others" is not only debasing to authentic Christian faith, but also to authentic human relationships, which don't need to be cloaked in religious language to be meaningful. The reading of the Council documents on this point as on others is notoriously selective or even worse, entirely hearsay, as with the scriptures. The Council, if it encouraged men to become more aware of the modality of Christ's presence in his people, also had the wisdom to point out that we don't know whom or what we're encountering unless we're in contact with Christ through the scriptures and private prayer.

> Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the Word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), seek his will in every event, see Christ in all men whether they be close to us or

> strangers, and make correct judgments about the true meaning and value of temporal things, both in themselves and in their relation to man's final goal. (DLA, 4.)

"Jesus Would Never . . ."

If firsthand and sober acquaintance with the Council documents is rare, so also is firsthand acquaintance with the picture of Jesus presented in the scriptures. It is not uncommon for many people in positions of responsibility in the Church today to be operating with notions of what the Council says, and what the scriptures say, that are seriously incomplete. Many people have a vague notion of Jesus as a "good guy" who helped the poor and told people to love one another and operate with a fuzzy, almost symbolic, notion of Jesus as the symbol for a liberal's idea of goodness.

Expressions like the following reveal the popular presuppositions about Jesus that prevent many from even hearing his actual words and behavior in different situations: "Jesus would never hurt anyone" — oftentimes said to rule out the possibility of asking someone to repent, putting service to Christ as first priority over other relationships or activities. "As Jesus said, a penny saved is a penny earned" — the wisdom of Jesus is not infrequently confused with the wisdom of Benjamin Franklin and others. "All Jesus really said was love" — as a matter of fact he said quite a bit more apparently for some good reason. The actual words of Jesus to those good people who yet didn't see the need for accepting him (Jn 8:39-59), the content of his preaching (Mk 1:14-15), the facts of his deeds (the exorcisms, the healings, the forgiving of sin), the exact content of his teaching on love (Jn 13: 34-35), and the meaning for us of his death, resurrection, and the fact of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-42) are completely neglected.

"Return to Prayer"

There are a growing number of people, groups, even movements, that are beginning to restress the need for prayer in our lives. Unfortunately, because of the confusion abroad on even more fundamental bases of the Christian life, namely, Jesus as Savior and Lord, to encourage people to pray is a

very ambiguous thing. Prayer and Christian prayer are different things. Christian prayer flows from a certain relationship with the Father through submission to Jesus, and through the effective indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who forms and moves Christian prayer. Prayer is not nearly fundamental enough to effectively bring about sound Christian renewal today. When you mention prayer, people understand quite different things by it. Prayer is not simply "self-reflection" as some would have it, whereby one thinks over life's problems and options to get "insight." Nor is it simply a psychological technique for "growth" or "inwardness" or the unfolding of our personalities. It is something, if it is Christian prayer, that has to do with communion and fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is entered into through a very specific way, the narrow way, of Jesus himself. It is something that comes from being baptized in his Spirit through repentance and faith.

As important as prayer is, to look on it as the main focus of Christian renewal is to look other than to the foundation. In fact, getting into prayer if the foundation isn't solidly laid, can simply cause more problems, and delay the real renewal. Prayer presupposes a basic rightness in our relationship with the Lord. If there is unconfessed sin in our life, or resentments or hostilities that we are holding onto, or relationships that we are in that are inappropriate for our state in life, or a root infidelity or ambiguity in our commitment to Jesus, prayer may not be the best focus of our attention. In fact, it may serve as an escape or blind. The fundamental realities of repentance, confession of sin, commitment to Jesus, being baptized in the Spirit need in many situations to be faced and worked through directly before prayer can be what it should be in our lives. In some situations prayer indeed can lead us to become more sensitive to the need for looking to our foundation, but today it seems just as often to be a substitute for truly fundamental renewal, a step in the right direction perhaps, but not quite far enough. "Houses of Prayer," for example, may or may not be Christian prayer, may or may not be producing Christian renewal. Prayer is not the answer in our present situation, Jesus is.

If our understanding of and commitment to the person of Jesus are distorted, so too will be our understanding and experience of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has become very popular in the post-Vatican II Church, but all too often there is very little authentic understanding and experience of his work. On the one hand, there are those who through contact with biblical theology have been forced to refer to the Holy Spirit more frequently, but in fact expect him to do nothing that really makes a difference or could be noticed. When Paul speaks in his second letter to Timothy (3:5) of those who hold the form of religion but deny its power he describes a situation which exists quite commonly today.

On the other hand, there are those who may be quite effusive in their praise of the Spirit and believe him to be working constantly in their lives but who are dreadfully mistaken about what spirit in fact is leading them. To indiscriminately attribute to the Spirit of God the effects of a variety of group interaction situations, or one's latest impulse or feeling or idea or romantic urge, is to reveal a gross ignorance about his authentic workings. The Holy Spirit is not a wispy, vague spirit, but has definite characteristics. He comes alive in a person's life in a definite way, performs certain definite functions, and is recognized in his authentic workings through concrete rules of spiritual discernment. Discernment of spirits, the ability to tell whether a certain impulse, course of action, idea is being formed by the Spirit of God, the inclinations of our own nature, or the power of evil, is essential, if we are indeed to follow the Spirit.

An excellent article on the state of belief concerning the Holy Spirit in the Church today, as well as an analysis of his current activity in the charismatic renewal, has been written by Father Edward O'Connor, C.S.C., and published in the *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America,* June, 1969, vol. 24. It has also been rewritten and included as a chapter in his new book, *The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church,* published by Ave Maria Press.

Christian Community

As understanding and experience of the unique person of Jesus and his unique action in our lives grows dim, so too does our understanding and experience of the community, the common life, that is to be based on him. The community that is produced without repentance, confession of sin, acceptance of Jesus as Savior and Lord, receiving his Spirit, no matter what label it bears is not a Christian community.

It is common today for people in positions of responsibility to say that the purpose of Christianity is to create community, or to discover community. Religious orders, groups of priests, parishes, are all trying to build community. This is obviously one of the greatest needs in Church renewal, as our orders, parishes, associations, are only communities in very minimal ways. And, indeed, the key to releasing the power of God in the world today is very much tied up with us becoming real communities, rather than just collections of people.

But the foundation, indeed more than the foundation, the very fabric of Christian community is the living person of Jesus. He is and has to be the *actual* effectively realized and present foundation stone, cornerstone, of the community. It is his Spirit that is to fit the stones of the building together, bring a harmony so that the community is experienced as an actual organic unit, a body. It is starkly true that: "Unless

the Lord build the house. . . ." It is the Lord himself, as we submit our lives to him, consciously, explicitly, and in a body, that builds us into a Christian community. That foundation of the effective presence and power of the Lord Jesus is lacking in many of the efforts to build Christian community.

Christian community is not just "getting people together" —it isn't just getting people relating and working for a common goal, or even living together, nor does it just happen by letting the "Spirit" work. Christian community is the response, individually and collectively, of a people to the Word of God, a decision to submit totally to that Word together, consciously and explicitly, and to allow the Lord to build a people, a community. Christian community is not the same thing as a sensitivity session, or warm feelings of closeness and meaning with all kinds of people, atheists, agnostics, Jews and Hindus, for example. Christian community is the living manifest body of the Lord Jesus, and can exist in no way except through repentance for the forgiveness of sins, commitment to him, and receiving his Spirit. The foundation must be laid before the building can be built. There is only one foundation. Many "renewal communities" are being built on sand. The second and third story is being put up without a foundation. Brick is being put on glass. These houses have fallen and will fall. Only what is fully in Christ will remain.

> Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and not put into practice what I teach you? Any man who desires to come to me will hear my words and put them into practice. I will show you with whom he is to be compared. He may be likened to the man who, in building a house, dug deeply and laid the foundation on a rock. When the floods came the torrent rushed in on that house, but failed to shake it because of its solid foundation. On the other hand, anyone who has heard my words but not put them into practice is like the man who built his house on the ground without any foundation. When the torrent rushed upon it, it immediately fell in and was completely destroyed. (Lk 6:46-49)

> Thanks to the favor God showed me I laid a foundation as a wise master-builder might do, and now someone else is building upon it. Everyone, however, must be careful how he builds. No one can lay a foundation other than the one that has been laid, namely Jesus Christ. If different ones build on this foundation with gold,

> silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, the work of each will be made clear. The Day will disclose it. That day will make its appearance with fire, and fire will test the quality of each man's work. If the building a man has raised on this foundation still stands, he will receive his recompense; if a man's building burns, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one fleeing through fire. (1 Cor 3:10-15)

Before we go on to the area of Christian mission, let's take a look at a few additional manifestations of distorted notions of Christian community.

"Meaningful Personal Relationships"

Clearly one of the areas of greatest need in the renewal of the Church is in understanding and experiencing healthy personal relationships with a variety of people. As might be expected, if there isn't a solid foundation of repentance and a continuing life of union with Christ or if that foundation has eroded, the kind of personal relationships that develop might run into more than usual difficulties. "Christian love," in many renewal situations, unfortunately, bears more relationship to eros than agape, and this not uncommonly between people with commitments that make this kind of relationship inappropriate. If outright adultery among renewal people isn't quite so common yet, a very real and actual spiritual adultery is. Married women and priests, priests and nuns, nuns and married men, and all kinds of other combinations, enter into relationships of intimacy and "sharing" which develop a dependency and possessiveness, a showing of "affection" and a secrecy, which has already entered into the realm of the erotic.

"Eucharistic Community"

If the eucharist is celebrated by people who aren't firmly committed to Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, and living a life of prayer and service, then the eucharist is liable to be "used" to achieve any variety of purposes. Sometimes it becomes a vehicle by which interpersonal relationships can be shared and expressed in the "sharing" of the dialogue part

of the eucharist, or in a developed kiss of peace. Sometimes it becomes a tool to build community, and help people experience community. Other times it becomes an opportunity for a particular celebrant or group to push their thing. Some canons that are popularly used express attitudes directly counter to the gospel and to the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which is supposed to be entered into more fully, and proclaimed, at the eucharist. Because the eucharist is so firmly embedded in the Catholic tradition, rather than discard it, it is not uncommon for it to be celebrated, sometimes even using the "correct" words, but with a purpose far from its true one. This is done often in the name of community.

Christian Mission

If the realities of sin and Satan are ignored, if the identity and function of Jesus as Savior and Lord are ignored or only paid lip service, we might expect to find a conception of mission or apostolate that completely left out its heart. This is indeed what we find when very popular conceptions of mission completely leave out the work of evangelism which is clearly the primary mission of the Church. Some examples:

"The Mission of Christians Is to Love"

"Love" is a word that has become almost completely useless if we are interested in clear communication. When we use the word today we must take care to define its meaning or almost certainly be misunderstood. First of all, Jesus never spoke of the mission of Christians as simply to love. He did tell his disciples, pointedly, to love one another, but added, "as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). In other words, he felt it necessary to point his disciples in the direction of his own example as the kind of love he was urging them to.

The love that Jesus had for all men and for his disciples also can properly be called redemptive love. It doesn't deny but encompasses and goes beyond the love of eros (man-woman love) and philia (friendship love). It broadens out into agape, which is loving without getting anything in return,

loving because of what God is doing in us rather than for the attractiveness or merit of the love object. The agape, service-love, that Jesus pointed his disciples to, necessarily included in it a desire for men to find salvation by repenting, believing, being baptized and receiving the gift of the Spirit. It was a love based on truth, knowing that true peace, joy, love for man lay in being reconciled with God through Jesus and entering into the fellowship of his body.

Loving, as Jesus loved, means not just the corporal works of mercy, but the spiritual, and not just the works of mercy, but evangelism. Evangelism is the action of love which is painfully aware of the needs of men beyond the surface. Evangelism is love guided by the true awareness of the dimension of our problem. Evangelism is love being exercised in the light of the coming judgment, which even now is painfully aware that "the wages of sin" even in the present life "is death." An apostolate which deals only with the material and psychic needs of man is seriously truncated; only when the spiritual situation is changed through repentance, faith, baptism for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit has the specifically Christian mission been fulfilled.

"Vatican Council II Says . . . Get Involved"

One frequently hears from both laymen and clergy the exhortation to "get involved," often with a reference to Vatican Council II and its call for an involved laity in an involved Church. Unfortunately the call to get involved, even if it were effective in producing involvement, is not nearly precise enough to lead to Christian involvement. Getting involved in politics, the ecology movement, the peace movement, the problems of the family next door, the problems of the parish isn't in itself Christian action. It may or may not be depending on the nature and goals of the involvement. Carrying out the Christian mission in the world is quite a distinct thing from simply getting involved and acting in the world. Unfortunately today many people have based whole directions of apostolic action on a very hazy and incomplete understanding of what both the New Testament and the Council

actually say about Christian mission. The love and wisdom forming Christian action issue in evangelism if they are authentically Christian. The many disparate things the Council said about mission are ordered and the priorities laid out in the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. It singles out three dimensions of the apostolate, the primary being the work of evangelization, and the others being the work of renewing the temporal order of society, and doing works of mercy and charity.

> The mission of the Church concerns the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ and by his grace. Hence, the apostolate of the Church and all her members is primarily designed to manifest Christ's message by words and deeds and to communicate his grace to the world . . . however, an apostolate of this kind does not consist only in the witness of one's way of life; a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to believers with a view to instructing and strengthening them toward a more fervent life. "For the love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14), and the words of the apostle should echo in every Christian heart: "For woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16) (Paragraph 6. See also paragraph 13.)

The true apostle, one who is truly carrying out the Christian mission, is *necessarily* concerned about evangelism in his own involvement; indeed, it is the desired goal of all Christian involvement.

In the New Testament it is stated even more starkly:

> "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)." For if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Faith in the heart leads to justification, confession on the lips to salvation. Scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." Here there is no difference between Jew and Greek; all have the same Lord, rich in mercy toward all who call upon him. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
>
> But how shall they call on him whom they have not believed? And how can they believe unless they have heard of him? And how can they hear unless there is someone to preach? And how

can men preach unless they are sent? Scripture says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news!" (Rom 10:8-15)

"All Men Are Already Redeemed, Redemption Has Already Happened"

Even among those who still know that Christianity has something to do with redemption, with freedom from the realities of sin and Satan, the evangelistic responsibility is frequently denied by pointing out that the world is already redeemed. A Christianity built on partial truths, as the centuries have amply witnessed, can be a disaster. It is woefully inadequate to consider the world simply as already redeemed and to dispense with the need to announce the good news and invite men to repentance and faith. The first stage of redemption has already happened. Satan and sin have been definitively crushed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but in order to experience this freedom men must consciously and explicitly in their own lives and persons reject sin and Satan and turn to Jesus for salvation, deliverance, and the gift of the Spirit.

The task of Christians then between Pentecost and the Second Coming (the second and last stage of redemption when God will manifest his glory to the whole world and establish his reign over it) is to invite as many as possible to appropriate the gift of salvation by calling on Jesus and being baptized. Men will remain slaves to sin, in bondage to the enemy, unless they are instructed and invited to throw off the chains of the definitively defeated, but still powerful enemy, by turning to Christ. Redemption, like the sacraments, can be misunderstood if we concentrate only on the *ex opere operato* aspect, and ignore, as we have for so long with the sacraments, all the difference that personal desire and appropriation makes.

"Anonymous Christians"

What Karl Rahner offers as a speculative possibility to explain how possibly men can be saved without consciously and

explicitly embracing Christ becomes the center of many persons' thinking, or rationalizing, about Christian mission. To suppose that *some* men may, without knowing Christ, somehow have chosen him by the way they lead their lives, very quickly becomes the assumption for *all* men, with the consequence that the world is very quickly labeled "already Christian" and we absolve ourselves of the need for evangelism. A completely unfounded, naive view of the human race as consisting of men of immense good will and openness to the truth, completely contradicts the view God's Word gives to us of our condition and the attitude of our hearts toward him and the truth. Theological speculation about a certain restricted range of possible cases soon becomes, in popular renewal, truth more certain than God's Word.

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the irreligious and perverse spirit of men who, in this perversity of theirs, hinder the truth. In fact, whatever can be known about God is clear to them; he himself made it so. Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made. Therefore these men are inexcusable. They certainly had knowledge of God, yet they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks; they stultified themselves through speculating to no purpose, and their senseless hearts were darkened. They claimed to be wise, but turned into fools instead; they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images representing mortal man, birds, beasts, and snakes. In consequence, God delivered them up in their lusts to unclean practices; they engaged in the mutual degradation of their bodies, these men who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator—blessed be he forever, amen! God therefore delivered them up to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the men gave up natural intercourse with women and burned with lust for one another. Men did shameful things with men, and thus received in their own persons the penalty for their perversity. They did not see fit to acknowledge God, so God delivered them up to their own depraved sense to do what is unseemly. They are filled with every kind of wickedness: maliciousness, greed, ill will, envy, murder, bickering, deceit, craftiness. They are gossips and slanderers, they hate God, are insolent, haughty, boastful, ingenious in their wrongdoing and rebellious toward their parents. One sees in them men without conscience, without loyalty, without affection, without pity. They

> know God's just decree that all who do such things deserve death; yet they not only do them but approve them in others. (Rom 1:18-32)

The common stumbling block to evangelism of wondering about what is to become of people who never hear of Christ in an effective way, must be recognized for what it is: venturing into a realm of speculation about which God's Word says little. We don't know. All we know, and we know this so clearly and definitely that if we neglect it we do so at our great peril, is that we are to call all men to repentance and to the union of the race around the person of Christ.

The essence of Christianity involves its universal extension. The uniqueness of Jesus, in his life, death, and above all in his resurrection, and the evidence of his messiahship and sonship in the phenomenon of Pentecost, the continuing phenomena of Pentecost, must be grasped clearly. Jesus is not just one of the great figures of the Western world, or one of the great founders of world religions on a par with Buddha, Mohammed or Socrates or Martin Luther King or Che Guevara—but of a different order entirely. No other great world figure rose from the dead. God may indeed be working in the great world religions; individual Moslems or Hindus or "humanists" may indeed have appropriated certain virtues better than Christians. But the fact remains that through the variety of ways God has worked and is working, his fullest revelation of himself and his final desire is for the race to be united around his beloved Son consciously and explicitly. It is through conscious and explicit union with Christ that the fullest possible access to God and participation in his nature and Spirit are available to us.

> In times past, God spoke in fragmentary and varied ways to our fathers through the prophets; in this, the final age, he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he has made heir to all things and through whom he first created the universe. This Son is the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the Father's being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he took his seat at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven, as far superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. (Heb 1:1-4)

> He has rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Through him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.
>
> He is the image of the Invisible God, the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him, and for him. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being. It is he who is head of the body, the church; he who is the beginning, the first-born of the dead, so that primacy may be his in everything. It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:13-20)

"We Need to Pre-evangelize"

When evangelism is admitted as part of the unified fabric of the Christian mission, it is not uncommon to hear that the ground has to be prepared first by pre-evangelism. What this pre-evangelism is is never made terribly clear. How to evaluate if a particular course of action is indeed preparing men to hear the Word of God is almost never explored. Guidelines for judging in what situations pre-evangelism might be suitable for are not very clear, and most commonly it is assumed that no situation is ready for evangelism, and that the task everywhere should be to pre-evangelize. I am certain that whatever validity the theory of pre-evangelism has (and I am not certain it has any whatsoever) in most of the situations in which I have heard it invoked, it has been a convenient theory to cover up the fact that there has been a radical loss of confidence in the truth of Christianity, the uniqueness of Christ, or even his very reality. It has also been frequently coupled with a deep fear that even if Christianity is true this particular situation would never accept it, or a fear of personal inadequacy in living or communicating it. These are painful things to say and to notice, but it is more painful to see an intrinsic part of the gospel being subverted to cover up personal problems.

In some situations I am convinced that what is being called pre-evangelism, particularly in certain religious edu-

cation programs in this country, is actually anti-evangelism, and is actually breeding attitudes and predispositions hostile to the gospel. In these situations the effectiveness of the programs seems to be determined by religious education conferences they've been to—which say they're effective—rather than by a careful empirical study or interview procedure which tries to find out what's really happening. The fact that students like a particular program, or that the staff relates well with the students, says nothing about its *Christian* effectiveness.

"Church as Sacrament to the World"

Faced with the ever-growing gap between the Christian Churches and the population explosion, and feeling the full impact of the ineffectiveness of much that is being done as regards mission, many are being led to adopt a view of mission that subtly defuses it of its evangelistic thrust. It is increasingly common to hear of the Church as a remnant, with the implication that not too many people are really going to become Christians or stay Christians. But rather than consider this a tragedy or a cause for self-examination, it is accepted and justified by thinking of the Church as primarily a sign of what will one day be for all men, not expecting many men now to join themselves to the Church.

The Church is indeed a sign of what is to come, but when it is functioning well it is meant to draw many men in this life, into its life. To suppose that the Church could be functioning well and fulfilling its purpose and not be drawing many to its life is fundamentally mistaken. If Christian community is of the essence of Christianity, evangelism is of the essence of the Christian community. Evangelism is both an effect of a healthy community life, and a cause of its health.

> I do not pray for them alone.
> I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word,
> that all may be one
> as you, Father, are in me, and I in you;
> I pray that they may be (one) in us,
> that the world may believe that you sent me.
> I have given them the glory you gave me
> that they may be one, as we are one—

I living in them, you living in me—
that their unity may be complete.
So shall the world know that you sent me,
and you loved them as you loved me.
Father,
all those you gave me
I would have in my company
where I am,
to see this glory of mine
which is your gift to me,
because of the love you bore me before the world began.
Just Father,
the world has not known you,
but I have known you;
and these men have known that you sent me.
To them I have revealed your name,
and I will continue to reveal it
so that your love for me may live in them,
and I may live in them. (Jn 17:20-26)

A reverent fear overtook them all, for many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles. Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each one's need. They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With exultant and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all the people. Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

In God's plan of salvation, the life of love and unity of concrete Christian communities is intended to draw men to faith in God and in Jesus as the Savior sent from God who loves men. The life being lived, and the word that explains it, the preaching, work together to bring men to faith. In Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost he points to the vital Christian community, filled with the Spirit, praising God, to what they can "see and hear" (Acts 2:33) as an important part of the evidence that gives credence to Jesus' claims and identity as messiah. To think of the Church as a passive sign that doesn't reach out to draw others into its life is a denial of its very nature. Even the notion of sacrament involves a word as well as a sign, as well as an effective action.

It is very understandable why many are inclined to adopt

a view of mission that blunts the gospel imperative to preach the gospel to every creature. The tension of looking at the world in all its glory and the weakness of the Church is indeed great, and some way has to be found to live with it. Reinterpreting the New Testament summons to mission is one way, but in the process one departs from essentials of the Christian faith and undercuts its very heart. Is there another way? Let's ask ourselves a few hard questions.

Is our witness so ineffective because it is to a program, a way of life, an institution, a set of principles, a morality, rather than to a living person whom we know, love and experience? Do we demythologize and reemphasize because we no longer experience, rather than because it is no longer true? If so, the solution to our mission problem, is not reinterpretation and the invention of theories to cover up the pain. It is rather to turn to God in deep repentance, admitting our poverty and our need, and asking to be baptized in his Spirit. It is to join ourselves with others who know their need, and God's provision of his Spirit to fill that need, in vital, daily community life.

> " 'I know your deeds; I know you are neither hot nor cold. How I wish you were one or the other—hot or cold! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth! You keep saying, "I am so rich and secure that I want for nothing." Little do you realize how wretched you are, how pitiable and poor, how blind and naked! Take my advice. Buy from me gold refined by fire if you would be truly rich. Buy white garments in which to be clothed, if the shame of your nakedness is to be covered. Buy ointment to smear on your eyes, if you would see once more. Whoever is dear to me I reprove and chastise. Be earnest about it, therefore. Repent!
>
> " 'Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears me calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with me. I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself won the victory and took my seat beside my Father on his throne.
>
> " 'Let him who has ears heed the Spirit's word to the churches.' " (Rev 3:15-22)

On one occasion when he met with them, he told them not to

leave Jerusalem: "Wait, rather, for the fulfillment of my Father's promise, of which you have heard me speak. John baptized with water, but within a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

While they were with him they asked, "Lord, are you going to restore the rule to Israel now?" His answer was: "The exact time it is not yours to know. The Father has reserved that to himself. You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you; then you are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, yes, even to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:4-8)

We are back at the beginning.

Before such need, how superficial, pathetically superficial, is much of the busyness with renewal. We reformers know so much about religion and about the Church and about theology, but we stand empty-handed and uncomfortable when confronted with sheer hunger for God. Holiness is less easily acquired than fluency in contemporary thinking. But people who, after listening to our enthusiastic discourses, quietly ask us to lead them to God are, though they do not know it, demanding holiness in us. I fear they may find everything else but that. The harnessing of modern publicity and know-how to reforming zeal is a potent cause of deception. Saints were required in the past to renew the Church. We suppose we can get by as spiritual operators.

Zeal for renewal may be used as a way of escaping God. The busier we are about liturgical matters, the lay apostolate, ecumenism, the biblical revival, reform of Church structures and all the rest, the more incessant our activity in the cause of the aggiornamento, the less need there is to confront the reality of God in our own lives. A fear prevents us from admitting the emptiness we should find there. (Charles Davis, *America,* January 29, 1966)

Causes of Confusion

Understanding why we are where we are as regards the renewal confusion in the Church today can help us understand how to move forward in a solid way, with compassion as well as wisdom. A variety of factors have combined to facilitate the growth of such a considerable counter-gospel in the Church. Bringing them to light can help free the action of the Spirit and the cooperation of men that is needed to correct the situation.

1. Psychological Trauma

No one was quite aware of the magnitude of change that was to occur in the years following the Council. The whole system had held so firm for so long that when so many "certainties" began to give way before the various streams of biblical, liturgical, theological and pastoral renewal it produced in many what deserves to be called a psychological shock. This psychological shock seriously affects the ability of the people involved to live the Christian life and trust God.

Because the whole fabric of Christian faith, including the very essentials of faith in God, redemption, mission, were bound up with a whole manner of institutionalization, involving a system of rules and guidelines that governed virtually every aspect of life, when the latter began to go, so did the former. Not many have been able successfully to

distinguish for themselves the essentials of Christian faith from its manner of institutionalization and formulation. When certain nuns who had been trained in absolute obedience to the will of God represented in their superior discovered that perhaps mother had been misusing her position, and perhaps she should share some ideas of her own, it caused real problems. Distrust and a sense of betrayal by the system also got carried over to a distrust and sense of betrayal by God himself. Not knowing if you could trust what the superior or the bishop said led to problems with God himself. Not only the system came into question but the very fundamentals of Christian faith.

A normal reaction set in among many which caused them to move toward certain aspects of renewal with something that approached a vengeance, but upon closer analysis revealed, also, an incredibly deep hurt. The infection of secular humanism has spread most among and by those closest to the Church: priests, nuns, seminarians, ex-seminarians, lay theologians, those most concerned about their total investment in it. The cult we find nowadays of interpersonal relationships, the indiscriminate ecumenicity, the almost complete abandonment of any sense of the uniqueness of Jesus, of Catholicism, of Christianity itself, the stress on social action to the almost total ignoring of prayer and evangelism, are all normal reactions to the sudden and traumatic unveiling of things seriously in need of change in the Church. One would expect that after the initial reaction has run its course, as in some ways it appears to be already doing, that a better sense of balance would be regained from it all. As the wound heals, and the shock wears off, we might expect this to happen. However, there are other factors involved which complicate the situation.

2. *The Work of Satan*

We will not be able to adequately understand and deal with the current situation unless we recognize the work of Satan in it. If we persist in thinking that we are dealing with simply human problems and human mistakes we will never

be able to make headway in so many of the situations which quite simply have something more than flesh and blood involved in them.

> Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and his mighty power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above. You must put on the armor of God if you are to resist on the evil day; do all that your duty requires, and hold your ground. Stand fast, with the truth as the belt around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and zeal to propagate the gospel of peace as your footgear. In all circumstances hold faith up before you as your shield; it will help you extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, the word of God.
>
> At every opportunity pray in the Spirit, using prayers and petitions of every sort. Pray constantly and attentively for all in the holy company. Pray for me that God may put his word on my lips, that I may courageously make known the mystery of the gospel —that mystery for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may have courage to proclaim it as I ought. (Eph 6:10-20)

What *perhaps* began as a normal reaction or primarily a psychological shock, now in many cases is considerably more: a hardened, sometimes irrational hostility to God, which bears many of the traditional characteristics of the work of Satan and has been in a growing number of situations dealt with successfully in these terms. There are many individuals who simply will have to learn to recognize, rebuke and resist the work of Satan in their lives; many will need outright deliverance from the power of the enemy.

3. The Reality of Sin

If healing is needed, if understanding is needed, if deliverance from the power of Satan is needed, so also in many situations will repentance from sin be needed. What perhaps began as a psychological wound, or normal reaction, has in many cases been personally consented to and embraced, in a willed act of hostility to God.

4. The Problem of False Prophets and Teachers

In certain renewal circles, both in theology and religious education, along with efforts at a new language and relevance, there is also evidence of departure into false prophecy and teaching against which both the Old and New Testaments warned:

> For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth and will wander off to fables. (2 Tim 4:3-4)

> Thus the word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel, prophesy! Say to those who prophesy their own thought: Hear the word of the Lord: You did not step into the breach, nor did you build a wall about the house of Israel that would stand firm against attack on the day of the Lord. Was not the vision you saw false, and your divination lying? Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have spoken falsehood and have seen lying visions, therefore see! I am coming at you, says the Lord God.

> For the very reason that they led my people astray, saying, "Peace!" when there was no peace, and that, as one built a wall, they would cover it with whitewash, say then to the whitewashers: I will bring down a flooding rain; hailstones shall fall, and a stormwind shall break out. And when the wall has fallen, will you not be asked: Where is the whitewash you spread on?

> Therefore thus says the Lord God: In my fury I will let loose stormwinds; because of my anger there shall be a flooding rain, and hailstones shall fall with destructive wrath. I will tear down the wall that you have whitewashed and level it to the ground, laying bare its foundations. When it falls, you shall be crushed beneath it; thus you shall know that I am the Lord. When I have spent my fury on the wall and its whitewashers, I tell you there shall be no wall, nor shall there be whitewashers—those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw for it visions of peace when there was no peace, says the Lord God. (Ez 13:1-16)

What began years ago as tentative, speculative theology has progressed, in certain instances, to a worked out, systematic world view or "new ideology" which is fundamentally in opposition to what, for lack of a better name, has been

called orthodoxy throughout the centuries. There is serious and systematic departure from the basic saving message and reality in some of the new approaches to the content of religious education. The conferences, workshops and lectures where this has occurred have had an immense influence on priests and nuns and educated laymen throughout the world. Facing up to the existence of false prophecy and teaching will be an essential part of the restoration of a healthy Church life and mission.

5. Environmental Pressure in "Official Church Circles"

This has been a significant factor in eroding Christian faith. In most theology departments, seminaries, and schools there has been a peer group pressure against expressing faith in the person of Jesus. In addition, the almost exclusive focus of renewal on the important (structural change in religious and parish life, celibacy, birth control, woman's role, diaconate, parish council, etc.) has left almost no time for work on or deepening of the essential (trust in Jesus, life in the Spirit, etc.). Focusing on the essential, while not neglecting the important, must not only be done, but expressed and lived openly, creating environments in the Church (vital Christian communities) which are supportive of the essentials of Christian life and faith.

6. The Problem of Pastoral Naivete

One of the facts that must be faced if the renewal is to develop soundly is that most priests and nuns aren't capable of dealing critically with theological concepts at this time. Another fact that must be faced is that many of those speaking at summer workshops and at various institutes and conferences on theology and religious education and scripture seem to be oblivious to the fact of what's being done with the "education" they're providing. Because there seems to be lacking both in the theologians and the priests and nuns a fundamental clarity about the heart of the Christian message, oftentimes what's being presented as a speculative possibility or as an intriguing possibility, gets presented in next Sunday's

sermon or next year's religion class as what Christianity is all about. Even in the large number of renewal leaders that are "sound" in their theology there seems to be a pastoral unawareness of what's being assimilated, and what's being done with what is being presented.

7. The Problem of Feelings of Personal Inadequacy

There is a very common block or screen keeping many of us from looking at the actual condition of the Church today. Fearing that we might not be able to cope with the situation if it's very far removed from "basically all right," we stick our heads in the sand and try to smooth things over. Basically this is opting out of the battle. Facing this fear of inadequacy, and overcoming it with acts of trust and abandonment to God, knowing full well our poverty and weakness, is the way to a healthy life for us as well as that part of the Church we're responsible for.

> But I refrain, lest anyone think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from my lips. As to the extraordinary revelations, in order that I might not become conceited I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to beat me and keep me from getting proud. Three times I begged the Lord that this might leave me. He said to me, "My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection." And so I willingly boast of my weaknesses instead, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
>
> Therefore I am content with weakness, with mistreatment, with distress, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ; for when I am powerless, it is then that I am strong. (2 Cor 12:7-10)

The same fear and inadequacy keep us from hearing the Word of God, and responding to those words of Jesus that rip our hearts apart as he calls us to that kind of relationship with him which is characterized by leaving all for him. The paradox is true.

> Jesus said to all: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps. Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his

> life for my sake will save it. What profit does he show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process?" (Lk 9:23-25)

We indeed are poor, but it is precisely in our poverty that God's power is given an opportunity to manifest itself.

> It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but we are not crushed; full of doubts, we never despair. We are persecuted but never abandoned; we are struck down but never destroyed. Continually we carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed. While we live we are constantly being delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh. Death is at work in us, but life in you. We have the spirit of faith of which the Scripture says, "Because I believed, I spoke out." We believe and so we speak, knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will raise us up along with Jesus and place both us and you in his presence. Indeed, everything is ordered to your benefit, so that the grace bestowed in abundance may bring greater glory to God because they who give thanks are many. (2 Cor 4:5-15)

As was suggested when talking about pre-evangelism, one of the things that keep us from acknowledging the clear call to evangelism is our fear that we're not able, the situation would never accept it, the world will not respond. We sense our weakness and fear the weakness of the Christian message. We fear it will have no impact. This is a realistic evaluation. This is particularly evident in the high school apostolate, which I think is one of the most difficult in the Church today. I think it's probable that most of the people in this apostolate are not able to do very much within the framework which they must work, and the state of their own lives. Radical changes in our lives, producing a truly fervent love for God and man, and perhaps also in our working framework are needed. But the place to start is by acknowledging what the truth is, not reinterpreting it to ease our discomfort.

> Act on this word. If all you do is listen to it, you are deceiving yourselves.
>
> A man who listens to God's word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks into a mirror at the face he was born with; he looks at himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looks like. There is, on the other hand, the man who peers into freedom's ideal law and abides by it. He is no forgetful listener, but one who carries out the law in practice. Blest will this man be in whatever he does. (Jas 1:22-25)

Perhaps the classroom situation isn't at all the way to evangelize the young. Perhaps we need Christian communities to grow up in as the visible expression of the life of Christ which gives power to evangelism. Perhaps this is the way the Lord is leading us as the financial crisis closes more and more schools.

8. Need for New Pastoral Structures and Skills

Huge numbers of those responsible for preaching the message and building Christian community don't know how to do so. Many don't have the natural and spiritual gifts to do so. The whole system of full-time service in the Church needs a total reevaluation. Who should be doing it, how should they be trained, what varieties of ministries exist, how does a community grow . . . all have to be reconsidered from the ground up. The current pastoral system and structure need, as many have been saying, fundamental review.

The old pastoral system we are still living in, as well as the pastoral training designed to prepare people to work in it, did a tremendous job for a long time. It is now quite simply no longer able to deal adequately with the modern situation. Population growth and shifts, life-style changes, changes in mentality, and many other factors all contribute to making much of the present system and many of those who serve in it no longer effective in meeting the needs. For example, the system and those who are trained for service in it are basically designed to tend those who already have faith. When that fundamental faith has been so widely eroded, the system and those who were trained for it will obviously be out of joint.

If the situation has shifted from one of tending already existing Christian communities to one of building or rebuilding them from the ground up, many changes in our pastoral system and training will have to take place. If we are in need of, and indeed beginning to experience, a truly fundamental renewal, we will need to begin to come to grips with the very real problems of new wine and old wineskins.

Toward a Solution

I would like to pick out three elements that I feel must be the bases of authentic Christian renewal. A book could be written about each.

1. Preaching the Gospel

As I hope has been made clear from the preceding, there is a need for the Church to re-lay the very foundation of the Christian life in large segments of the Church today. That foundation has been eroded, weakened, and in some cases replaced by a counter-foundation or new ideology of secular humanism. I hope also it has been made clear that the very heart of the gospel, the message of repentance, of faith, of baptism, of the gift of the Spirit is the place where we must start and where we must continue as long as the world lasts. The foundation is always in danger of shifting, of weakening, and the key to the health of the Christian people is the continual preaching of the gospel.

2. In the Power of the Spirit

"Correct theology," however much stress I've placed on the importance of knowing clearly the truth of the message in the light of the crisis of truth in the Church today, is not nearly enough. Much of the preaching and teaching in the Catholic

Church today produces no fruit, is empty, changes no lives. It is only the action of God in preaching and teaching, the work of the Spirit, that produces heart changes. The men and women teaching and preaching must indeed be baptized in the Spirit, must be equipped with gifts of the Spirit, be called and equipped for this ministry, living lives of deep and regular prayer. It is a spiritual ministry, not one that bears fruit if it is just of the human will or mind or emotions. So many of the words of Jesus cut through our whole lives and cause a fundamental reevaluation of the worth of what we're doing. His words about the Spirit are no exception.

> "Flesh begets flesh,
> Spirit begets spirit." (Jn 3:6)

> "It is the spirit that gives life;
> the flesh is useless.
> The words I spoke to you
> are spirit and life." (Jn 6:63)

> Those who live according to the flesh are intent on the things of the flesh, those who live according to the spirit, on those of the spirit. The tendency of the flesh is toward death but that of the spirit toward life and peace. The flesh in its tendency is at enmity with God; it is not subject to God's law. Indeed, it cannot be; those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. If Christ is in you, the body is indeed dead because of sin, while the spirit lives because of justice. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also through his Spirit dwelling in you. (Rom 8:5-11)

> As for myself, brothers, when I came to you I did not come proclaiming God's testimony with any particular eloquence or "wisdom." No, I determined that while I was with you I would speak of nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified. When I came among you it was in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation. My message and my preaching had none of the persuasive force of "wise" argumentation, but the convincing power of the Spirit. As a consequence, your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

There is, to be sure, a certain wisdom which we express among the spiritually mature. It is not a wisdom of this age, however, nor of the rulers of this age, who are men headed for destruction. No, what we utter is God's wisdom: a mysterious, a hidden wisdom. God planned it before all ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age knew the mystery; if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. Of this wisdom it is written:

> "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard,
> nor has it so much as dawned on man
> what God has prepared for those who
> love him."

Yet God has revealed this wisdom to us through the Spirit. The Spirit scrutinizes all matters, even the deep things of God. Who, for example, knows a man's innermost self but the man's own spirit within him? Similarly, no one knows what lies at the depths of God but the Spirit of God. The Spirit we have received is not the world's spirit but God's Spirit, helping us to recognize the gifts he has given us. We speak of these, not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, thus interpreting spiritual things in spiritual terms. The natural man does not accept what is taught by the Spirit of God. For him, that is absurdity. He cannot come to know such teaching because it must be appraised in a spiritual way. The spiritual man, on the other hand, can appraise everything, though he himself can be appraised by no one. For, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:1-16)

"This much have I told you while I
was still with you;
the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit
whom the Father will send in my name,
will instruct you in everything,
and remind you of all that I told you." (Jn 14:25-26)

"Yet I tell you the sober truth:
It is much better for you that I go.
If I fail to go,
the Paraclete will never come to you,
whereas if I go,
I will send him to you.
When he comes,
he will prove the world wrong
about sin,

about justice,
about condemnation.
About sin—
in that they refuse to believe in me;
about justice—
from the fact that I go to the Father
and you can see me no more;
about condemnation—
for the prince of this world has been condemned.
I have much more to tell you,
but you cannot bear it now.
When he comes, however,
being the Spirit of truth
he will guide you to all truth.
He will not speak on his own, but will speak only what he hears,
and will announce to you the things to come.
In doing this he will give glory to me,
because he will have received from me
what he will announce to you.
All that the Father has belongs to me.
That is why I said that what he will announce to you
he will have from me." (Jn 16:7-15)

Frankly, Church renewal, indeed, depends on our experiencing a new Pentecost, as Pope John prayed as he opened the Council. Nothing less will produce Church renewal. So many of our programs, structures, courses, sermons, are "of the flesh, of the will of man"—the frightening judgment is that they produce no fruit. Only what is of the Spirit produces life. What does it avail us—all our budgets and programs and councils? Nothing, unless they be of the Spirit of God.

Again, frankly, I believe the heart of this new Pentecost to be emerging in the charismatic renewal.* Only when the Church and all of us are open to all the workings of the Spirit, will we be equipped with sufficient power from on high to effectively be his witnesses.

3. *Building Community*

The question of the reevaluation of parish structure and

*A catalogue of literature and tapes on the charismatic renewal, as well as information on prayer group locations, is available from the Communication Center, Box 12, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556.

the present shape and training for ministry and pattern of ministry is something that will take years to work out. But God is acting now. And already we can see outlines, if you wish, of the "Church of the future" emerging here and there, local churches, Christian communities, living a fervent Christian life, experiencing the full range of workings of the Spirit, bearing the fruit that Jesus promised as daily there are added to their number those who are finding salvation. Preaching the gospel in the power of the Spirit will produce awakened Christians hungry for more, who need to begin to pray and share together and seek him together now.

God is drawing together people across parish and religious order, lay-clerical bounds, and urging them to begin now to be something together for him. As these prayer groups and charismatic communities grow up it is important to recognize that, as in other ages of renewal, there is a need to seek great wisdom and compassion concerning the impact of the new wine on the old wineskins, but while maintaining our serious commitments and responsibilities to the old order, there is a need to move with God's Spirit into the new, which, I think we shall see, is loving and serving the old most fully.

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